[Excerpted from Denis Diderot, "Letter on the deaf and dumb for the use of those who hear and speak" (1751).]

Letter on the deaf and dumb for the use of those who hear and speak

Denis Diderot

I used to frequent the theatre, and I knew by heart most of our best plays. On the days when I meant to examine actions and gestures I would climb to the gallery, for the further I was from the actors the better. As soon as the curtain was raised, and the rest of the audience disposed themselves to listen, I put my fingers in my ears, much to the astonishment of my neighbours; not knowing my motives, they looked on me as a madman who only came to the play to miss it. I paid no attention to their remarks, and kept my fingers obstinately in my ears as long as the gestures and actions of the actor corresponded with the dialogue which I remembered. When I was puzzled by the gestures I took my fingers from my ears and listened; Ah, how few actors there are who can stand such a test, and how humiliated the majority would be if I were to give the world my criticisms! But judge of my neighbours' surprise when they saw me shed tears at the pathetic passages, though I had my fingers in my ears. That was too much for them, and even the least inquisitive began to question me. But I coolly answered that "everybody had his own way of listening, and mine was to shut my ears to hear the better," and found some silent amusement in the comments caused by my real or apparent eccentricity and in the simplicity of some young people who also tried putting their fingers in their ears to hear as I did, and were surprised at their lack of success.

Whatever you may think of my expedient, pray consider that if, to judge correctly of intonation, we must listen to an actor without looking at him, it is very natural to watch an actor without hearing him, if we are to judge correctly of his gestures and action.

[Excerpted from Mike Gulliver, "Deafscapes: The landscape and heritage of the Deaf world," presented at Forum UNESCO conference, Newcastle University, April 2005. Reprinted courtesy of the author.]

Deafscapes: The landscape and heritage of the Deaf world

Mike Gulliver

Deaf history of Deaf

There is an alternative deaf history…

This history begins with an indication that whilst isolation might have been the fate of some Deaf people, fully developed communities of Deaf people existed over 2000 years ago who used sign language for all parts of everyday life including philosophical argument, technical explanation, teaching and business. Given that only 1 in 1000 people are actually born Deaf it is hard to see how sign languages that sophisticated might have evolved. However, the factor that is often forgotten is the case of Deaf families, some of which show over 200 years of uninterrupted Deafness. There is no doubt at all that these families represent the heartland in which sign language communities originally developed, drawing in other Deaf people, and even sometimes hearing people.

It is this crucial ability of the Deaf community to pass on sign language and culture to subsequent generations which allows the development of what we find. Instead of isolated Deaf individuals, we actually find extensive networks of Deaf communities which have little to do with the hearing world, but are constructed according to factors from the Deaf world. Resembling more a series of interconnected nodes, more like a synaptic map of the brain than a modern territorial map, this landscape exists, not as the hearing world simply 'replicated in sign language' but as an entirely separate layer of reality in which Deaf people live, dipping into a foreign hearing world only when they chose. It is this that I am calling the *Deafscape*.

In a pre-industrial world, this Deafscape consisted of a tissue of communities stretched over Europe, the middle East, North America (and would certainly have extended into other areas of the world although research has not confirmed this). Concentrated around indigenous sign languages and the ease of travel, its distribution and communication resembles that of the hearing communities that produced the language continua that we still find; for example across the dialects of the Mediterranean. Developing in a non-nationalist context, its boundaries are very different from those of the hearing world. In Britain, for example, a large community based in Kent had links to communities as far apart as London and the East coast of America. In France, on the other hand, the Paris and Lyon communities developed along different lines based on different indigenous sign languages.

Deaf views on the Deafscape

Firstly, we need to consider how Deaf people themselves saw the Deafscape. For them, it was not merely an optional form of social organisation, but the inevitable consequence of

their being part of an entirely different order of nature with a vastly different metaphysics. This included an interpretation of deafness itself which was not based on a 'loss' model but rather on the way that it transformed them into a 'visual' people with a distinct cognitive development based on visual and spatial thinking.

An important element of this distinctive thinking is sign language. Not as a simple communication tool, but in a way which is reminiscent of aboriginal community discourses concerning their relationship with the land. Again, strongly metaphysical, the relationship that Deaf people describe between themselves and sign language is symbiotic and creative with each being responsible for the creation and well-being of the other.

This relationship of co-creation applies, not only to the symbiotic relationship but also to the conditions that allow this to occur. This is Deaf space. Not simply a physical container for events, but an interactive space that is called into existence any time Deaf people come together and are allowed to interact. Deaf spaces are constantly evolving and may either erupt when Deaf people meet spontaneously or they may have some sense of permanence such as in the Deaf families that we mentioned earlier.

All of this proceeds under the umbrella of naturalness. Naturalness, is not a reference to some external order of creation, but rather a measure of the extent to which sign language, Deaf space and Deaf people are able to enter into this symbiotic co-creative relationship without interference from non-Deaf forces. If the development of elements within the Deafscape is natural, then it will continue to define Deaf nature, sign language and Deaf people themselves in a way that preserves the health of each.

The lived-in contours of the Deafscape; strong centres of Deaf-space, peripheral members, empty spaces where no deaf communities exist, historical backgrounds, agreed reputations, physical and linguistic boundaries and pathways of communication. All of this is built on the foundation of these metaphysics and then provides the Deaf-centred epistemological basis with which Deaf people look out upon the world.

[Excerpted from Jeffrey Mansfield, "Space, Time and Gesture: Gestural Expression, Sensual Aesthetics and Crisis in Contemporary Spatial Paradigms," in *TACET* #03 – *From Sound Space* (Paris: Les presses du réel, 2014). Reprinted courtesy of the author.]

Space, Time and Gesture: Gestural Expression, Sensual Aesthetics and Crisis in Contemporary Spatial Paradigms

Jeffrey Mansfield

Dissecting the Space and Time of Language: Eric Malzkuhn's "Jabberwocky"

With its rapid movements, expressive facial contortions, and invented signs of a gestural and meaningless quality, Eric Malzkuhn's virtuoso 1939 translation[1] of Lewis Carroll's "Jabberwocky" into American Sign Language demonstrated fluidity previously unseen in the barely hundred-year-old language. Prior to Malzkuhn's rendition, sign language was constructed as a signifier language that relied on objective representation, sometimes utilizing its visual and physical qualities to take an iconic appearance, which otherwise remained no less arbitrary than a phonetically formed lexicon. With its sweeping gestures engaging the entire body and wide-ranging cadence, Malzkuhn's rendition of the "Jabberwocky" did more than present the canonical work in a new modality; it transcended signification and the conventional space and time of language to heighten language's spatio-temporal dialectic.

In "Jabberwocky," Malzkuhn's decision to eschew a traditional reliance on established signifiers, partially driven by necessity, due to Carroll's nonsensical words such as "mimsy," "frumious," and "vorpal" and partially driven by theatrical license, activated not only the speaker's body but also brought the body of language, with its spatial and temporal properties, to the forefront. The notion that language is a body traces its lineage back to Saussure, for whom words are arbitrary, phonologically-derived "sound images" that could be injected with meaning by linking with actual objects or concepts, (signifieds). The introduction of nonsensical words in "Jabberwocky" unravels this symbolic marriage… meaning is marshalled out of meaninglessness.

Toward the Sinthome: The Gestural Stain and the Body

Rather than represent or indicate movement, appearance, or action through semantics or something closer to resemblance, Malzkuhn's hand shapes, movements, and facial expressions "speak to us" and mark that very "instant when his vision," the mental image formed by his perception, "becomes gesture" materially inhabiting a body that asserts itself "not only for the mind but for themselves, since they pass through us and surround us" (Merleau-Ponty 2002c: 12-13). Sign language, especially poetry, according to Dirksen Bauman, are "not so much "read" or "seen" as they are *lived-in* from the inside."

[1] Unfortunately, no video recording of Malzkuhn's original performance exists. After a bout with polio left him physically unable to perform, Malzkuhn collaborated with Joe Velez of the National Theatre of the Deaf on an authoritative version, videotaped in 1968. In a segment filmed in 1994 for the *Live at SMI!* series and another segment in Miriam Lerner's 2009 documentary, *The Heart of the Hydrogen Jukebox,* Malzkuhn performed a toned-down version of his translation. However, for the purposes of this paper, Velez's performance, shown here, http://videocatalog.gallaudet.edu/?id=6518, will be taken as the canonical version of Malzkuhn's original translation.

Bauman, discussing another sign language poem, remarks that these forms of gestural expression brings forth what for Merleau-Ponty was "a diagram of the life of the actual" into a kind of "poetic incarnation." For the verb phrase, "gyre and gimble," Malzkuhn amplifies a handshape previously assigned to the word "tove" in a series of motions that doesn't represent but actually reproduces the sensation of this particular movement for the viewer to sense. For the adjective "vorpal," Malzkuhn mimics the act of drawing the sword but modifies "the manner in which the sword is drawn to indicate that the sword is not straight," conveying the speaker's own perception of the action for the viewer to internalize. Watching Velez execute Malzkuhn's rendition is a material sensation in itself.

These visual stains mark a major divergence from the conventional temporality of language, where speakers and listeners can only express or perceive what someone is trying to say as quickly as streams of words or signs are constructed -- at the speed of language and within the ordered, rigorous space of language. However, densely packing linguistic data within a few encompassing movements, as with visual vernacular, or "pure" sign language, allows the speaker to bypass the very streams of words and signs that comprise the order of language, and betray linguistic space and time.

From the Sinthome: Conditioning and De-Conditioning the Body

In fact, from the outset of the Enlightenment, the evolution of sign language and deaf education is predicated on the methodical repression of the overly expressive, meaningless gesture. As deaf education grew in 17th and 18th century Europe, the rational structure of the spoken and written word supplanted gestural expressions, which became increasingly standardized as representational units of language. Emblematic of these developments, the Abbe l'Epee attempted to fix gestures into standardized signs by composing a dictionary of signs, a project he would later abandon. However, Roche-Ambroise Sicard, a former pupil of l'Epee, later set about revising and expanding l'Epee's dictionary in late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century. As Condillac had observed with a pang of disappointment, the unnatural, linear structure of conventional language was increasingly making its way into signed languages. Striking a similar sentiment, Roche-Ambroise Bebian later argued that Sicard had over-regulated signs undermining the symptomatic element naturally occurring in sign language, which escaped standardization. It is also worth noting that such developments were not limited to sign languages, as numerous bourgeois societies developed taboos against excessive gesturing during speech.

In light of these efforts to exercise authority over sign language, Malzkuhn's rendition countered the current of these social- and language-conditioning programmes and liberated sign language's repressed sexuality. In many respects, sign language draws comparisons with music as an oft-persecuted, symptomatic mode of expression. As Žižek remarked, "it is amazing to observe how much energy and care the highest ecclesiastic authority (popes) put into the seemingly trifling question of the regulation of music." The social spaces assigned to music, whether the orchestra, the music hall, the church, the radio, or the iPod, provide frameworks for the exploration and enjoyment of music's sensual aesthetics. On the other hand, spaces assigned to sign language and the body-that-is-deaf and the strategic production of space using sign language as media is historically far sparser and largely restricted to the schools for the deaf and deaf social clubs, which have benefited from the asylum model, but as long as sign language travels wherever its users go, inevitably spilling

out of its designated spaces, escaping total surveillance and, like music playing in unexpected settings, the effect can appear somewhat discomforting and threatening.

The American artist Christine Sun Kim, who is deaf, has carved a space for herself in the mainstream by embracing this very disruption. Taking the disruptive quality of her own deafness a step further, Sun Kim recontextualizes sound, the thing that gives language its currency, wresting it from the grasp of the authorities, and making it her own. In "unlearning sound etiquette" (2013), Sun Kim goes beyond the auditory dimension of sound to explore kinetic, visual, and spatial dimensions that sensitize her audience to her kinesthetic perception of sound by undermining the phonocentric conceptions of sound, so that the audience is forced to question the essence of sound and traditional listening practices. Leaving the audience to redefine their own relationship to sound through the artist's terms, Sun Kim's work is subtly subversive and imbued with a rare potency. Further exploiting her position in a dialogue with society, her "Voiceless Lectures"[2] challenges the notion of the lecture as a vocal exercise and imposes her personal experience of communicating with pen and paper or a word-processing application onto the audience, embedding a critical territory of her own within the mainstream.

More frequently, the body-that-is-deaf drifts through mainstream space, struggling to assert itself, and often being compelled to return to more accommodating, "deaf-friendly" spaces, whether it is the home, the asylum-school, or other spaces delimited to sign language. An exception is when the interaction between the body-that-is-deaf and phonocentric spatial constructions strikes a critical balance, as in more personal, one-on-one or small-group settings that presuppose a prior willingness to interact. The game also changes when the profusion of sign language into public spaces reaches a certain critical mass, and the use of sign language becomes so prevalent that it imposes its will, with all its presymbolic sensuality, onto the public. The most striking example of this intrusion of sign language and its gestural stain into the public realm occurred in March 1988 during the Deaf President Now movement at Gallaudet University, when some 2,500 students and supporters, with their arms flying in the air, marched to the U.S. Capitol to successfully protest the appointment of a hearing woman with no prior knowledge of sign language to the post of University president -- a decision which was viewed as a blatant exercise of authority. Making its way to the National Mall and onto television sets across America during the movement, sign language asserted its spatio-temporal exuberance in city and country, stirring and threatening to upset social prejudices of language, body, and sensuality.

[2] In 2013, Christine Sun Kim gave a series of Voiceless Lectures as part of a lecture series curated by the artist at Recess entitled "Seeing Voice: The Seven-Tone Color Spectrum."

[Excerpted from Louise Stern, *Ismael and His Sisters* (London: Granta Books, 2015). Reprinted courtesy of the author.]

Ismael and His Sisters

Louise Stern

Chapter Six

Without being able to sit in front of the store in the evening light and see where one thing lay in relation to another as he sipped a cold Victoria beer with Jose, Ismael did not know where his mind stopped and the world began, or the other way round. It was not something he had ever questioned before. The separation had been clear and distinct.

For a few days after he saw the photo of the green-eyed woman in the car, Ismael saw vestiges of what had happened after the fiesta spill from him and alight into the vast, unknown city. They took shape against the blank screen of the side of a tall building; they came onto the stage of the luncheria counter as he munched on enchiladas, a Coca-Cola by his side. Then they flew back into him, and swooped hastily out again like bats. Their tiny talons grazed over Ismael's shoulder and caught his hair.

The quicksilver transformation from desire into violence of that night, the acute recognition of the man's malodorous flesh in Ismael's own as he brought the gun up and shot, the slackening of grudging family histories he had not known were still alive in him during the long walk back to the village from the cantina, collapsing into the past, his efforts to pin everything down where he could see it all like fireflies on a board, and, most of all, his agonizing failure to understand anything that had happened. The scathing taste of bile stayed in his mouth. Later, it became a stone in his gut, and nausea churned around it. Everything around him seemed distant and everything distant seemed close by.

It all mixed together and apparitions tumbled down on him. They were the only thing Ismael could see, but despite their presence he knew he had to try to find another job. He put one foor in front of the other and walked straight into the shadows without protection. After a day or two of walking up and down the mountain, the net loosening minutely with each step, he became strong enough to cut the threads of mesh that his interior mess was trying to spin around him. His feet were freed from their path up and down the mountain and they took him to the now familiar *mercado*, and he found a new job.

The last time, the boss had led him straight to the place he was to work; but this time, a paper with squiggly lines was handed to Ismael. He did not understand, and he told this to his new boss with a shrug and a finger pointed at himself, then two hands held upright on either side of the chest. Even the people here understood what this meant.

One of the other men at the job would be here in the *mercado* the next morning and Ismael could go with him to the job, he saw when his new boss with the purplish-whitish pouches under his eyes pointed to the skinny man with a pompadour and aviator shades and then to Ismael, then held his two forefingers together. He pointed to an invisible watch and held one palm and one finger up: six a.m..

Ismael knew the sun would wake him in plenty of time. The next morning, the first light came through the thickness of his sleep, but he defied it and stayed underwater for a little more time before he swam up through the sleek calm and awoke.

The man in aviator shades led him down a road lined with animal-feed stores, stacked plastic-weave bags, some of them spilling grainy seed, and sapphire and jade parakeets, wings beating in cages above them. Up this way past the fabric shop with its rolls of flowered vinyl and gingham at the corner, and a right, by way of a small

thoroughfare with adobe arches, behind each plastic-covered clothes hanging from wire hangers all the way up to the ceiling, handmade Maya traditional dresses bordered with blossoms and vines that stabbed Ismael with longing for his sisters and the village, and mass-manufactured polyester football jerseys and stiff pairs of jeans, bouquets of neon-plastic keychains out front.

Then they were out into a cobblestoned square. The man pointed to the opposite end to tell Ismael that was where they were working, but Ismael was mesmerized by a group around a few tables at their end of the square. Hands rose and established themselves into foreign patterns that stitched the disparate world together in a way Ismael had not seen since leaving home.

The Mexican sign language used here in the city was different from the regional Mayan sign language dialect used in the village, as different as Spanish is from spoken Mayan. And Ismael had never left the village and had no experience of picking up another language. Yet there was a core alertness to the physical shape of things that helped him sense what the group was talking about.

Everything in his starving, desperate body turned towards the group, but Ismael had spent his very last few coins on his morning cup of Nescafé bought from the old pear-shaped woman. There had been no chilaquiles that morning, nor anything the day before.

The two hungers competed fiercely, and the one that yearned for human contact that would show him again where the boundaries of his self lay was winning easily. Then Ismael thought about what his father had asked him to do all those years before, and he wrenched himself away from the sight of the group and followed the man across the square to work.

His child's eyes, bewildered and bright, stayed on the group. Ismael had deaf eyes, and a craggy, hook-nosed woman with bright pink earlobes saw that with one glance and waived to him. He waved back, but he forced himself to walk past.

He was pulled along inexorably through the day as he hauled cement blocks from a pile on one side of a dusty, parched lot through the dormant, loitering air to another pile on the other side of the lot, his knuckles red and bleeding.

Ismael's mind was filled with the hands he had seen that morning. When they were finished for the day and the men went as always to the corner shop for a beer, Ismael ran back to the square, but they were not there.

Every morning now he looked for them, and the nights were not so dark or long. His delusions left for the cave where they roosted, in row after row of folded tissue, tenuous brown and grey blooms stuck like barnacles to the roof of the cave, their foul-smelling droppings building up into rock formations on the floor.

One night after work, Ismael wanted for the first time to enter the church at the bottom of the road that led up the mountain to his lean-to. He had felt too polluted even to look at it before.

The main doors were open and fluorescent strip lights were switched on against the night and the insects. Teenagers in their neon shirts leant against the cement walls or sat in the dark-wood pews, hands in their tight jean pockets, but they did not forget their chaperone. The Virgin of Guadalupe looked down from pennants, letters cut from felt, ceramic figurines, and a subtle painting by Omar Salamanca Lopez stood in the main altar against the back wall. In front of the altar were rows of flaming candles, each one a secret prayer.

Ismael had gone to church every week with his mother and then with Rosie after his mother died. His eyes always strayed to the pretty women watching so intently and earnestly. Here, it was the same, and the women were exotic and even prettier to him. But when entering and exiting the room, in the middle of flirting or laughing, every person

turned to touch forehead, heart, shoulder, shoulder, and then to kiss the hand that held all, and finally they clutched their hands to their chest, to try to put all they hoped and asked from Guadalupe and the church, into their hearts.

In the village it had been one gesture among many. In the city, it was for these movements that Ismael started going to the church every evening after his one beer with the men. You saw the sign all over the city, but it was concentrated at the church.

Ismael sat quietly in the pews, meeting no one's eyes, snatching onto the gesture every time he saw it and swallowing it deep. Like the sight of the group of deaf people, the gesticulation pushed Ismael further away from the edge and reminded him of the border between his frail husk and the unknowable world that housed him. He tried to paint the knowledge permanently onto the walls of his mind. A few weeks after he began going to the church, Ismael saw the hook-nosed deaf woman with pink stars in her ears sitting alone at the table where he had first seen her. He ran to her and she looked up, remembering him and those dark, quick moving eyes of his. He patted down on the space around him and shrugged; where are they? She answered with fluidity in her hands, and with it she pulled thick strands of contaminated blood from Ismael. He did not follow everything she said, but he understood that he was to come back to the square that night.

Another day of moving concrete blocks, and pollo quesadillas bought from a woman whose eyes, seeing inside herself rather than outside, made Ismael think of Rosie, after which he walked eagerly to the square. The tables were filled with conjuring hands and arms. The eyes had expressions that harmonized with Ismael's own.

In the centre of the group was a squat, thick-bodied woman about the same age as Christina. The certainty in her body and the penetrating quality of her eyes was heighted in her gestures.

Tippity-tap, tippity-tap, tippity-tap… her wee sausages of pinky fingers went up and down, up and down against the legs of her stool, but then her other fingers joined into the jig, and finally her clumsy wallflower thumbs dared to hop in. They exchanged partners, swung out and back in, and gathered together to the same beat, clap, clap down on the wood of the stool their owner sat on. One had clenched in front of the composed mouth, then the fist was opened and the fingers spead to pour from her lips, followed by the other hand. The river of her hands diverged for each hand to go in opposite directions. She closed both fists again, but now when they opened it was a quick, hard motion that fragmented the river she had just made. She continued to fragment it for some time, and with the last shattering motion she let her hand fade into space.

Her hands softened when they went as far as they could. They turned upwards and swept towards her chest as they moved inwards slowly. As her hands reached her breasts, they moulded all together until she had a whole again. She put her hands out one last time to make sure she had gotten all the crumbs into the ball. Finally, she put it down to roll away.

Ismael stepped up impatiently to her after she finished, wanting to be close to the first person he had seen since leaving the village who used the movements of her body to purify, as Jose did. He had the talent of finding a faithful rhyme in his body for concrete things, and the even rarer ability to transmit the shape of emotions and the anonymous in a way that Ismael felt the truth of. Without understanding the sign language that the woman used, Ismael saw she did this. He knew, in the same way that anyone sees the gesture made in devotion to the Virgin and knows the sincerity of it.

She nodded curtly to Ismael when he flapped his hand at her and pointed at his ear to tell her that he was also deaf. She had plenty of other people grouped around her, wanting to pay homage. He was just one more, and he did not look Mexican.

In some dismay, he turned back to the woman with pink at her ears, and she smiled; she understood when he told her in rudimentary gestures that he had recently come to the city from a small village with a different sign language. She told him a similar way that she was from here, from this city, and that she worked squeezing orange juice in one of the stalls in the *mercado*. Her name sign was Beak-nose, for her hook nose, and her husband had left her for another woman not too long ago.

Some of the other people he met that night understood him better than others did. In none of them did he find what he had in the village; the thorough sureness in the body and the complete ease with one another. After a little while, he understood that none of them had known each other a lifetime. They had grown up in a house where their parents and the people around them did not know their language, and even now, they spent most of their lives not understanding and not being understood. But Ismael drank thirstily of what came out of their hands and arms. And now he knew where and when to find them. He was stronger for the knowledge.

[Excerpted transcript from the first Deaf-Mute Banquet celebrating the 122nd Anniversary of the birth of the Abbé de l'Epée, Paris, 30 November 1834, translated from French by Mike Gulliver. Reprinted courtesy of Mike Gulliver.]

Banquet des sourds-muets: 122nd Anniversary of the birth of the Abbé de l'Epée

Prefaced and translated from French by Mike Gulliver

The Parisian Deaf community is one of the first in the world to be identified. By the 1770s, membership numbered about 200 but the community was loose-knit and had no real physical focus. It wasn't until the early 1800s that it gained one, in the school for deaf children, situated on the Southern edge of the city as the Rue St Jacques crested a hill and left Paris behind. The school community wasn't initially tied into the city's deaf population. Over time, however, the two began to mingle and the school, and its strong body of staff and pupils, became a key Parisian deaf heartland. That is, until the 1830s, when oppressive measures brought in by the school's new director began to separate deaf people in the school who could sign, from those who couldn't, and squeeze sign language out.

The response of the school staff was to rebel. Borrowing from Revolutionary tradition, they established a series of annual 'Deaf-Mute Banquets' in the city. Inviting politically active deaf people from across the country and from overseas: artists and poets, sculptors and writers, activists and educators who embraced a strong deaf-centred epistemology based around sign language, they celebrated their linguistic identity, their cultural strength, and their vision for a future in which Deaf culture would be accepted as equal to the cultures of the hearing world. —Mike Gulliver

What a strange thing it was to see this banquet, the means by which the deaf-mutes, ex-pupils of the Paris school, celebrated the one hundred and twenty second anniversary of the birth of the abbé de l'Epée.

For the first time they celebrated the memory of the one who, in their language – so poetic, so full of images, and which seems to contain distant echoes of the metaphorical idioms of the Orient – they always refer to as the *father of their minds*.

At five o'clock, nearly sixty members of this community; a nation in its own right, came together in the rooms of the restaurant in the Place du Châtelet. Present were teachers, painters, engravers, employees of different administrations, printers, simple labourers, those who – bitterly rejected from the heart of society – found the means, by their intelligence, to make their way within it and to win positions that would allow them to earn their way with honour.

Present were wide heads; high and well shaped, that would have drawn the admiration of the Phrenology Society – eyes that sparkled.

… with energy and enthusiasm, quick and active fingers that dance ahead of speech, the privileged representatives – we might say – of an entirely exceptional species, a species that is unfortunately real, and not merely imaginary (fictional/fantastic), one that the ingenious Swift did not suspect but that his pen would have described so well, had he known of it.

Only two *speaking people* were given the rare privilege of attending this foreign/strange feast; M. Eugène de Monglave, recently called to join the consultative commission established for the Institution Royale de Paris, a friend to sourds-muets, knowing their language, initiated to the *traditions* and *customs* of the nation. The other was M. B. Maurice, at that time, editor of the paper *le Temps*; an *unfinished/incomplete man* as those present would describe him, *impoverished* and lacking in the speech of mimique, pariah of the society present, obliged to fall back on a pencil as a means of conversing with the heroes of the feast. An expression of ineffable pity could be seen on the faces of all as he approached. *Poor thing,* said those happiest in that moment, *he can't make himself understood.* As for the rest, however, it would be a grave error to imagine that such a gathering presented anything painful or distressing. On the contrary, never has there been a more festive banquet, animated by shared feelings of sympathy and happiness.

The president of the feast, M. Ferdinand Berthier, a deaf-mute teacher at the Royal Parisian Institution, the same Berthier who introduced the most seductive actresses of the capital to the language of mimique, and to whom Lhérie owes his role of Saviour (Vaudeville being, at that time, in vogue), Berthier – whose face and fingers are so expressive, then presented the following eulogy of the Abbé de l'Epée.

> Brothers:
>
> The idea of this annual feast, set aside to perpetuate the memory of the glorious anniversary of the birth of *the father of our minds* is one that honours your thankful hearts…
>
> Our wishes are accomplished! Let us, therefore, allow ourselves to fully rejoice in this shared celebration! Will not such a formal step prove to France, to all civilised nations, that we too are able to appreciate the work of this man of genius, a work of goodwill and emancipation, a work left to the Motherland, a work shared then for the good of a grateful world.
>
> Charged, by your choice, with presiding over this first, numerous assembly, how can I thank you for such a great honour and unexpected honour? I'm so proud of the order of superiority of mimique over speech, and I tremble with such strong and raw emotion that I am almost unable to continue. But your intelligence and wisdom will complete what might be found lacking in the expression of my thinking.
>
> I understand, furthermore, what the unanimous suffrage of my brothers imposes upon me in terms of devotion or perseverance in the accomplishment of new obligations that I now take up on your behalf, before heaven, and before men. My whole life belongs to you, and only you have the right to dispose of it as you see fit. I too have the right to count on the constant support of you as brothers with me, to second my efforts and to support me so that I am up to the mission that you have chosen to confer upon me.
>
> Carried to this tribune by your applause (a strange spectacle that no century before has ever witnessed), how can I inaugurate this holy institution any better than to remind you of the virtues and the work of the abbé de l'Epée? Indeed, to raise the bar, I will not spend any time asking you to recall the sad conditions in which

sourds-muets lived – times of barbarity and civilisation, that even extended to the eighteenth century, a period when human progress was otherwise so rapid.

Before this immortal founder, there were but a few, generous men who … were committed to the relief of such a cruel infirmity; but their efforts were exhausted in the midst of public indifference. The attempts that they made to give our brothers the use of speech, considered from time immemorial to be the only means for the transmission of ideas, were too weak to overcome so many obstacles. Only one was able to find a way that was infallible; giving it worth and allowing it to spread, so that it would right the wrongs of nature. His happy wisdom seized upon the language that is given, without exception, to all thinking creatures, the language that our ancestors spoke, that our descendents will speak, that is understood just as well by those who live in the wilderness (desert) and those who live in the town - that is to say, the language of signs.

In both his public and private lessons, the abbé de l'Epée allowed people to see beyond unbelief, and to admire – even as it was still clothed in the swaddling of infancy, still unshaped, incomplete and unrefined – the infinite variety and immense resources of that gestural language. Your elders, his first pupils, have told you many times of the marvels of his growing school, how each day brought new visitors from all over the world, and from all social standings, and where the children themselves were most specifically the object of his compassion; "It was, after all", he would constantly repeat, "for them that I have become a teacher".

What crowned such great sacrifice was to see him give his adoptive children all of his wealth. Refusing even the most basic things for himself so that he could give it to them, risking his health to save theirs. Even in advanced old age, and in the midst of the most cruel winter, he was seen to deprive himself of wood so that his poor sourds-muets would not lack anything, and only agreed to come and warm himself when his children, tears in their eyes, came and pleaded with him to look after himself for their own sake.

You know of the interest that the emperor, Joseph II, a sovereign well known for his popularity, had for the establishment of the abbé de l'Epée, and that he visited it several times during his time in Paris

This 'prince philosopher', surprised that in the midst of prodigious favours meted out to so many unknowns no-one had thought of such a useful man, proposed one day to ask the King for an abbey for him, or to give him one in one of his own estates if this request met with obstacles, so that he could – he said – enjoy the benefits of his work. "Sire", answered the modest teacher in response, "I am already old. If your majesty wants to do good for those who are sourds-muet, then he should not do it by loading blessings onto my already-bent head. Rather, he should benefit the work itself, for it is worthy of a great prince to perpetuate something that is of great worth to humanity." The emperor, understanding his thought, sent him a priest from his own country to study his method.

Let's cite something more from the father of our minds: "Monseigneur", he answered the ambassador of the Empress of Russia who, in 1780, offered him gifts of riches from her sovereign, "I never take gold. But tell her majesty that if my work

> appears worthy of some esteem, I would ask her to send me a deaf-mute whom I might instruct."
>
> Who would have thought it, having sacrificed everything; time, fortune, health, to such a marvellous goodwill establishment, it was in vain that he asked the powers that be that what he had founded be granted appropriate and durable support after his death. Indeed, it was only two years later that the Constituent decreed that the school of the abbé de l'Epée become a national institution.
>
> I will stop here, I can't think any more, the facts speak for themselves, I can no longer master my own emotions… emotions which you doubtless share and will respond to in the toast that I propose to your thankful hearts: To the eternal memory of the Abbé de l'Epée!

Hearing these words, so well known to all present, the young people applauded with enthusiasm. Two elderly gentlemen, previously pupils of the abbé himself did not applaud with the others… they wept.

After the speech given by M. Ferdinand Berthier, several toasts were proposed:

By M. Lenoir, a deaf-muteteacher at the Royal Institution:

> To the intellectual regeneration of the sourds-muets, spread across the surface of the earth; to their unity, and their brotherhood: sourds-muets from all nations, let us form a holy alliance and take each other by the hand!

By M. Mosca, a deaf-mute painter:

> My dear brothers, I am Italian, and a pupil of Turin. I have accepted with haste the invitation that you made me to attend the first banquet to celebrate the occasion of the anniversary of the Abbé de l'Epée, our common benefactor. This illustrious name is so dear to deaf-mutes of all nations! Permit me to interpret to you the feelings of our Italian brothers. Upon my return to my own beautiful country, I propose to follow the example that the French deaf-mutes have set first.
>
> Long live the French deaf-mutes!

By M. Peyson, deaf-mute, historical painter, pupil of Messieurs Hersent and Léon Cogniet, one of the candidates in this year's grand prize, in Rome.

> May we one day honour the fine arts, as we already honour literature and science.
>
> To the fine arts!

A happy episode occurred to further heighten the brilliance of the feast.

The free Society of the Fine Arts were celebrating M. Daguerre and his tableau of the church of Saint Etienne du Mont.

M. Daguerre was later to discover the immortal secret of how to fix images by means of the camera obscura. The Free Society's meeting asked to mix, for a while, with that of the Sourds-Muets. This proposition was welcomed with enthusiasm, and the two families were soon no more than one. The infirmity of the one disappeared before the consideration of the other. There was, then, nothing more than one single, intelligent, people communicating with pencil, with brush, with fingers or with speech.